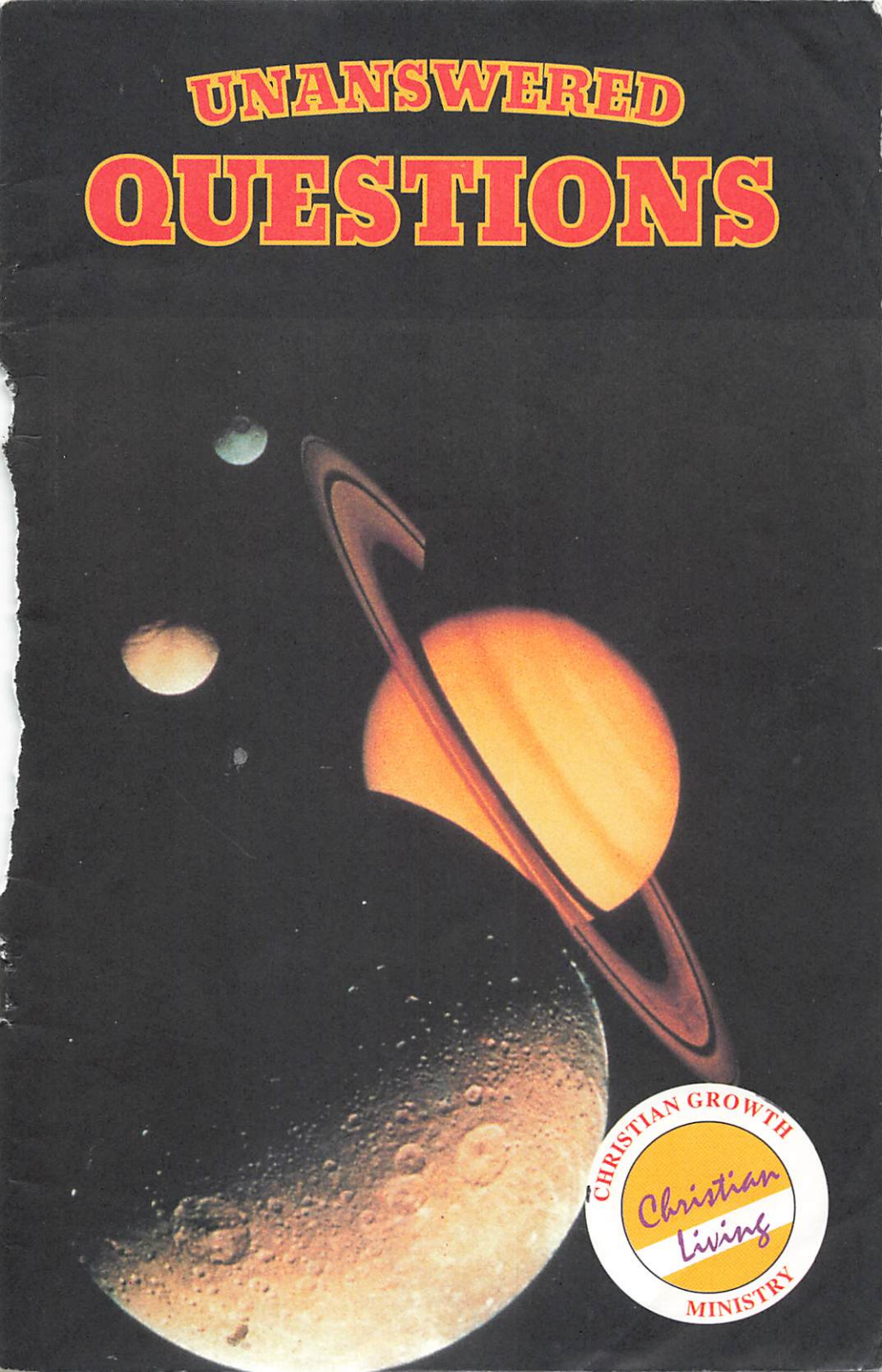
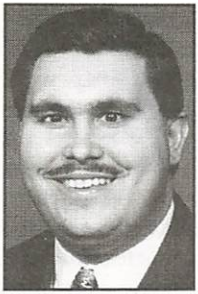
UNANSWERED QUESTIONS



CHRISTIAN GROWTH
Christian Living
MINISTRY

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS



Jerry D. Sawrie, writer

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Introduction

Human beings tend to ask questions. That is one of the ways that the Creator has provided for His creatures to learn. Early in life, children will ask questions of their parents — some of which are simple and straightforward, while others are more complex. Usually, the difficult questions come solely from the child's desire to understand the complicated world in which he lives.

The wise parent will not ignore the questions of his offspring, but he will answer according to the child's capacity to understand the meaning of the subject matter at hand and according to the parent's ability to explain it. At times, however, the questions are of such nature that the parent cannot give a simple answer. He may have to acknowledge that he does not know the answer, or he may need to point out that there are some questions that human beings are not equipped to resolve satisfactorily.

This series of studies deals with questions that are difficult to answer from man's perspective. Strictly speaking, they are not unanswered; however, they can be answered only with help from God. Each question generally deals with matters that show that the questioner is lacking in his knowledge of God, in his understanding of God's will and sovereignty, in his Bible knowledge, and in his faith. These studies will provide biblical answers to such questions as, "Isn't it enough to live a good life?" "Why are there so many denominations?" "Is there really going to be a hell?" "Won't heaven be boring?" and "What is wrong with sex outside of marriage?"

Among the good things that will come from studying such questions is the realization that God has given mankind an "answer book"—the Bible. By providing Bible-based answers to mankind's questions, these studies will teach the truth to lost people, showing that God loves all mankind. Furthermore, the lessons will strengthen believers by showing that each person, as well as each question, is important to God. Although not every question can be answered to everyone's satisfaction, the Lord gives sufficient principles in His Word to enable people to handle every situation that arises.

Bobby Joe Wright
Adult Editor

1 Why Is There So Much Evil in the World?

Romans 3:11-18

"Dad, why is the sky blue?" "Mommy, how do birds fly?" "Mom, how does the rain fall from the sky?" "Daddy, why do dogs bark?" As parents, we face many questions from our little ones, who try to understand all the workings of the big world in which they are living. Often we sidestep the issue by saying, "That is what God decided to do," or "That is just the way it is." Sometimes that satisfies our children, but at other times they continue to question us for information. We usually become exasperated at the barrage of inquiries and attempt to divert our toddlers' attention to less complicated matters. Our frustration does not come because we don't want our children to know these things, but it is because at times we simply can't answer their questions.

Knowledge of God will overcome evil.

Adults have many questions, as well. Often in our conversations with our peers, we ask tough questions, such as the following: "Why does God love us?" and "Why do bad things happen to good people?" During this series of lessons, we are going to tackle these issues and many others like them. The good news is that our heavenly Father is omniscient; He knows the answer to every question. His Word, the Bible, is a resource for us to find the answers to the questions we ask most. One that almost everyone asks today is, "Why is evil so prevalent in the world?" Turn to the lesson text to see how God answers our question.

The Depravity of Man Is a Downward Spiral

The simple answer to our question is the depravity of man. *Depravity* means that every individual is born with a sin nature. Our natural inclination in life is to sin. *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"* (Romans 5:12). It is not necessary for our parents to teach us how to lie or cheat. These are things that we must learn *not* to do. Unfortunately, depravity also means that, on our own, our condition will worsen. Man is not inherently good. If

we do not correct ourselves, everything about us will contradict God's ways. Our lesson text describes what we are in our natural state.

Our thoughts are unholy. Evil so pervades the world because man's mind is not — and cannot be — centered upon holy things. Since our thoughts are predominantly sinful, our actions are sinful. When Paul wrote *"There is none that understandeth"* (verse 11), he meant that we will not discover the truths of God (grace, atonement, forgiveness, redemption) by simply living. Our lives will lead us to a path of destruction (Proverbs 14:12).

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... Leviticus 19:1-18
Tuesday ..... Psalm 36:1-4
Wednesday ..... Psalm 52:1-4
Thursday ..... Psalm 109:1-5
Friday ..... Proverbs 10:9-14
Saturday ..... Romans 12:17-21

Our motives are unrighteous. Some want to believe that we humans desire to do what is right and honest — that by nature we generally are caring and concerned. In fact, our main objective in life is to please ourselves. Our motivation in most of our actions is to benefit us. Our motivation for working is primarily for financial gain, not to be industrious. Even our service to God is often self-centered. Many of us serve so others will notice us, but we fail to recognize that often we expect blessings or eternal rewards in exchange for our service. We must stand on God's Word and say, *"There is none that doeth good, no, not one"* (Romans 3:12).

Our words are ungodly. We wonder why bad news fills our newspapers and comprises 90 percent of the radio and television broadcasts, yet it is not often that our words speak positive things. We may not use foul language and take God's name in vain, but how many times has each of us come home from work and spilled all our gripes about our boss to our spouse? Do we spend more time telling our neighbors the latest gossip and tragedy or praising them for something they accomplished? Notice verses 13 and 14 of the text. If we are honest, our speech is like a graveyard. We lie to people more times than we tell them of Jesus. Our anger spills over to our mouths so often that we must constantly apologize to God and those around us.

Our actions are unscrupulous. *"Their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known"* (Romans 3:15-17). Many Christians say, "I am not a bad person; I have never killed anyone!" How many times have we gotten so angry with someone that we have wished calamity or even death upon that person? God tells us, *"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer"* (I John 3:15). We are all guilty of losing our temper at one time or another. That anger leads to unscrupulous actions.

Our attitudes are ungrateful. God is our sovereign Lord. He cre-

ated the world for our enjoyment. He sustains us each day with life. He set the order of the seasons in place, and provides rain and sunshine for us to produce food. He is in control of every aspect of our lives, yet *"there is no fear of God before* [our] *eyes"* (Romans 3:18). We seldom recognize and honor our God for His continued blessings. Even though He blesses without ever demanding anything in return, few individuals turn to Him daily to praise Him and thank Him for His goodness.

The Discovery of God Is a Forward Step

The evil continues because of sin. However, God gives us a way to escape the prison of sin. We do not have to contribute to the decline of our world. God offers us light in a darkened world. He wants to give us life where death abounds. He desires to turn our turmoil into peace. We must discover the grace of God and His invitation to be born again. Our physical birth tarnishes our spirit with sin, but Christ offers *"to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (I John 1:9). If we accept Him, two things happen to us.

We are transformed. *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"* (II Corinthians 5:17). When we accept Christ as our personal Savior by repenting of our sins, accepting the atonement of Christ on the cross, believing in His resurrection, and asking Him to give us eternal life (Romans 10:9-11, 13), God transforms us into new people.

He removes our hearts of sin and gives us hearts of holiness. Through Christ, we are able to wage battles against our sin nature. God doesn't make us perfect at salvation, but He replaces the negatives referred to in our lesson text with positives. With Jesus in our lives, we can seek God (Romans 3:11). By receiving the power of Christ, our words, actions, and motives can become honoring to God.

We are enlightened. Besides removing the negatives and giving us the ability to bring Him glory, God gives us a special understanding of Him and His ways. He places himself within us at redemption by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5; 8:9; I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). The Holy Spirit indwells us *"that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God"* (I Corinthians 2:12). Without the Holy Spirit working in us and revealing to us the ways of God and the mind of God, we would continue our ways of evil (I Corinthians 2:13-16).

The Holy Spirit convicts us when we fail God (John 16:9, 10) and guides us in the knowledge of God (John 14:26; 16:13). He also guides us in service to God. He gives us spiritual gifts, enabling us to serve God in our church (I Corinthians 12). He opens and closes doors of opportunity that we might know God's direction for our lives

(Acts 16:6, 10). Though God gives us direction, we must follow Him. We still choose the course to follow, and we can continue in our sins. Nevertheless, if we have Christ, we have the opportunity to break the influence of sin in our lives.

We cannot escape sin. Even though we are born again, we will fail God. The world will continue to be a place of sin. Murder, abuse, and wickedness will invade our lives. The Bible tells us that wickedness will continue to worsen as the appearing of Christ approaches. Not until Christ comes to set up His earthly kingdom will we see true peace and righteousness (Revelation 20:4; Zechariah 8:3-5; Isaiah 32:1). However, Christ can lift us up above the mire of sin and let us experience the joy of knowing Him. Have you experienced His power in your life?

2 Isn't It Enough to Live a Good Life?

Matthew 19:16-22

Living a good, moral life to attain salvation is futile.

Whether some want to admit it or not, every one thinks about life after death. Even those who say they don't believe in hell want to know what will happen to them when they die. For some, the question is a constant struggle because they believe their place in eternity is not certain until death. They have no security in the future. Others are confident that they have a home in heaven because they have placed their faith in God's Word. Many refuse to think about these things at this time. They busy themselves with the cares of this life, so they don't have time to worry about what might happen to them when they die.

However, everyone must face death. It is essential for everyone to consider what will happen next. Throughout the centuries, theologians have debated life after death. The different religious groups have their own interpretation of what happens to man after death. Every religion focuses on a place of rest, beauty, and perfection at the end of life — a place where no one ever dies or cries. Most people call this place heaven. Without exception, every person who walks the planet asks at one time, "How do I get to heaven?"

The Universal Question — How Do I Get to Heaven?

As Jesus walked our earth He encountered many different people. These people usually asked many questions. I find it interesting to notice the questions people asked Him when He possessed a human body. Many of the questions came from scribes and Pharisees who wanted to trick Him into giving a "wrong" answer. They asked Him about taxes, divorce, the law, and many other frivolous things. In the lesson text we find a young man who approaches Christ with a dilemma that is far more important. He asks the universal question, "How do I gain eternal life?"

This question is the most important that anyone can ask. It is serious because of the concerns involved. People want to know what will

happen in the future. The infatuation of psychics and fortune telling in our country shows us that people care about what will happen to them in life. I believe what they really want is security for the future. They want someone to tell them that everything will go well in their lives. They want to hear that they will have health, wealth, and happiness. Basically, that was the rich young ruler's question. He wanted to be confident that he was doing the right things to have a secure future.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... Exodus 20:3-37
Tuesday ..... Deuteronomy 10:12-14
Wednesday ..... Matthew 15:1-3
Thursday ..... Romans 8:1-5
Friday ..... I Peter 3:8-12
Saturday ..... I John 5:1-4

Also, the question is serious because of the consequences involved. Some religions do not teach eternal punishment. Some religious leaders teach three areas of life after death: paradise, hell, and a state of limbo. If one is not in heaven in the presence of God, any other place that he may be in is hell, even if it is not a lake of fire. The Bible teaches that a literal, burning lake of fire awaits those who reject Christ. Jesus talked several times of a place where souls lived in anguish (Luke 16:23-25). He described it as a place of *"outer darkness"* (Matthew 8:12), a place of *"wailing and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 13:42, 50). We cannot accurately describe the horror of someone being eternally in a *"furnace of fire"* (Matthew 13:42, 50). Some individuals throughout the world have lived to tell about a similar experience by being trapped in a burning building or an automobile. Thousands of others, sadly, lost their lives by the same means. However, when Christ talked about hell, He said that the fire burned but did not consume the individuals (Mark 9:48). A person sentenced to the lake of fire experiences an eternity of agony. He never leaves, and he never finds any relief. If one does not gain eternal life, then the only other alternative is eternal death.

The Universal Answer: Through the Blood of Jesus

There is only one answer to the rich young ruler's question. The answer has not changed in the past centuries, either. The universal answer to the universal question is "through the blood of Jesus." We notice that the young man who came to Jesus had the wrong idea, just like many millions of people do today. He said, *"What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life"* (Matthew 19:16). He thought that eternal life is based on two ideas: character and service. However, the Bible teaches that character and service are results of salvation, not requirements for salvation.

Eternal life is based on grace, not character. God's role in the plan is the essential one. If it were not for the mercy and love of God,

we would have no opportunity to gain eternal life. Many people believe that God owes us a place in heaven if we live good, moral lives. That is simply not true. Eternal life is a gift offered to us by God's grace (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8). It doesn't matter how high our moral standards may be, or how much we love our fellow man. Any person who does not receive the grace of God based on His conditions will not experience the joy of heaven.

It is commendable to have our neighbors compliment us on our morals and character. It is wonderful to have our bosses, coworkers, and associates speak to others about our ethics in business. It is an honor to have community leaders call attention to our reputation and trustworthiness. However, if we stand before Christ, and He says, *"I never knew you"* (Matthew 7:23), our character will mean nothing.

Eternal life is based on faith, not service. Our role in finding eternal life is placing our faith in Jesus Christ. God offers His gift to us, but we must accept it through faith. We must have faith that Jesus is God. We must believe that His death is our atonement for sin. We must believe in Christ's resurrection. We must have faith that our confession of sin and of Jesus as Lord is the only means of salvation. We must believe that He is able to keep us in His care for eternity. We must have faith that God's Word is true and faithful. We cannot explain our faith logically. We cannot prove our faith scientifically. God gives us proof by working in our lives. Our salvation must be in God, not in ourselves.

Millions across the globe have the false notion that one day we will stand before God and He will weigh our good deeds against our bad deeds. If the scale tips slightly in favor of the good deeds, then we will be allowed to enter heaven. God's Word never indicates that service is the means to gain eternal life; instead, it declares, *"With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.... For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Romans 10:10, 13). That is the only condition accepted by God for entrance into heaven. We cannot rely on our service (Ephesians 2:9).

Are you trying to gain eternal life upon the basis of your character or your service? Are you relying on your baptism or church membership to get you into heaven? All of these things show the world that you are born again. They testify of your faith in Jesus Christ. If you are not certain that God will welcome you into heaven when you die, please seek your pastor or teacher immediately to find peace and security for the future.

3 Isn't the World Hopeless?

Matthew 24:4-8; Revelation 11:15

> Christ is the answer to a hopeless world.

The headlines of our newspapers fill our hearts and minds with the belief that the world is heading downward very fast. We are not stunned or shocked to read every morning things such as: *Typhoon Hits Island: Hundreds Homeless*; *Bombs Shell Business District As Death Toll Climbs*; *Famine Reaches Epidemic Proportions*; *Government Leaders Overthrown by Guerrilla Army*. We cannot escape the tragedies that surround us. People everywhere are looking for answers to why these things are happening. Hope appears dim on the horizon, much like a distant dream.

Christians who are knowledgeable of God's Word understand the current events. God promises us that conditions in our society will worsen through the passing of time. We realize that the end of the age is very near. We also understand that the only way to cope with such a bleak outlook is to put our trust in Jesus. He is the only one who can comfort us when we feel that the world is hopeless.

The Signs of Horror

The lesson text tells of Jesus' giving a description of the condition of the world immediately before He sets up His earthly kingdom. It is not a pretty or uplifting situation. The world wants to believe that eventually the human race will wake up and stop the violence and destruction. Nevertheless, we must believe what Christ told us. He taught us that the world would endure a major upheaval before His second coming. He said that the world would see an increase of trouble in three areas (Matthew 24:4-8).

The increase of cults and false christs — One of the signs that Christ gave to us that the end of the world is near is the increase of people claiming to be the Messiah, as well as the spread of religions that distort the truth about Jesus Christ (verse 5). Over the past century, over three thousand new religions have formed, which could be classified as cults. Some leaders of religious groups, each of whom

claims to be Christ, recently gained national attention through some of their beliefs and practices and eventual confrontations with government officials. Many wonder why so many people follow such leaders. One simple answer is that many do not have a firm grasp of Scripture to discern correct interpretations. Others are looking for the love and companionship that these groups offer.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... Psalm 33:18-22
Tuesday ..... Jeremiah 17:5-8
Wednesday ..... Lamentations 3:18-26
Thursday ..... Romans 8:24-31
Friday ..... I Corinthians 13:8-13
Saturday ..... Philippians 1:18-26

It is most disturbing to see some of the cults gaining the status of mainline denominations. In a recent television program, a report centered on the controversy of Christian songs being sung at a graduation ceremony. At first, I became upset because one person denied the rights of others to refer to God at an important time in their lives. As the report continued, my frustration shifted. It revealed that most of the people in the community belonged to a religious group that is distinctly in error in their beliefs about God, Jesus, salvation, and the Bible. Still, the reporter gave them the same status as a Baptist, Presbyterian, or Methodist congregation. As the return of Christ approaches, we will continue to see this kind of deception.

Increase of civil confrontation — During the final years of the world, Christ tells us, *"Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars"* (verse 6). We are not strangers to news about wars across our planet. Almost every continent has a conflict between neighboring countries or a conflict between factions within a country. We continue to see political change and the outbreak of war every day. Even without the apparent threat of nuclear attack or nuclear war, the threat of another world war looms dark in the future. Minor skirmishes are being escalated into major battles. Countries continue to develop improved means of warfare and surveillance so that they will be prepared for a sudden attack.

Increase of calamities — As we read Matthew 24:4-8, one of the most difficult things to understand is why God must allow severe calamities to come upon seemingly innocent people. He promises that near the time for His return great disasters will engulf the world (verse 7). Several years ago the world news hardly ever mentioned an earthquake or natural disaster. In today's world, we see Christ's prophecy being fulfilled before our eyes. We are seeing reports of earthquakes in areas which had never experienced one in modern history. The weather and seasons are not nearly as stable as they once were.

Researchers indicate that many of the world's people are not getting enough food to eat. It seems that every time we watch news on

television, we see pictures of boys and girls disfigured because of a famine in their homeland. Even though medical technology is at an all-time high, diseases continue to plague our society. Diseases that at one time seemed completely cured are returning to us, and the old antibiotics are not affecting the illnesses. We appear to be fighting a losing battle. Where can we find peace?

The Source of Hope

The only way for us to find peace where so many negative things abound and where the future is bleak is for us to put our trust in the one who knows the future. God already knows what lies ahead for us. He is in control of everything that happens. He also gave us the Bible, and it tells us what will happen at the end of time. Even when Christ was explaining all the horrible happenings of the future, He said, *"See that ye be not troubled"* (verse 6). The second part of our lesson text, Revelation 11:5, gives us the hope that we need in order to continue living trustfully.

God: our sovereign — God promises us that one day He will call an end to all the evil and pain of earthly life. His Son will bodily return to earth and set up His kingdom, where He will subdue all the nations. The lesson text indicates a time when the angels in heaven will declare the end to man's tyranny. We recognize that God is sovereign over His creation; yet presently He is allowing Satan and man to have some control over the earth. One day, though, our heavenly Father will put down all rebellion and every one will worship Him and honor Him as the only king.

God also promised those who honored Him while on earth the privilege of reigning with Him (Revelation 20:4). Therefore, we must understand that the key to having true hope in a seemingly hopeless world is not to put our trust in man, but in God. Everyone wants to be part of a winning team. At the end of the age, God will be the victor. If we want to be a part of His team, we must recognize that we should worship and serve Him only.

God: our Savior — Revelation 11:15 mentions that the *"kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ."* The term *"Christ"* means "the anointed one." Jesus became the Christ when He left the glory of heaven and became a man. God anointed Him to be the one who saved the world from the destruction of sin. No other person ever received that anointing. Many appear on the scene to attempt to lead the people in "truth." However, no one except Jesus of Nazareth ever died for His enemies and rose after His death, proving that He was God and the ultimate sacrifice of the ages.

If we are putting our hope into anything or anyone else but Jesus, we are living in a hopeless world. Our hope comes from faith in His resurrection and the realization that one day we will experience that

resurrection when Christ returns to rapture His saints (I Corinthians 15:19-21). To be a part of this resurrection we must accept Jesus as our personal Savior. We cannot merely believe in Him. We must put our faith and life into His. We are to anticipate His return daily.

Christians should look at the conditions of the world and rejoice. Should we rejoice because the world is experiencing such great disasters? Yes. Christ said these are signs which point to His return. Even though we cannot predict the exact time, we know we are nearer than we ever have been before. We should praise God daily in anticipation of making our faith become a reality.

In the same light, we are not to be idle. We are not to say to ourselves, "The world is a mess, and it will soon end. I am glad that I'm saved." Rather, we should look around us and be certain that our loved ones are ready for the world to end. God gave us the responsibility to share the news with everyone that Christ paid the penalty of our sins on the cross. We must tell the world that accepting Him as one's personal Savior gives hope in a dying world.

4 Why Are There So Many Different Denominations?

I Timothy 6:3-5; II Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17

Guard against incorrect interpretations of God's Word.

Think about your home town. Count the number of churches surrounding it. How many different types of churches did you count? Ten? Twelve? Fifteen? More than that? We must realize that larger towns and cities will have more different types of churches than small communities. Nevertheless, I am sure that it doesn't take long to realize that denominations are everywhere. One source estimates that over 235 denominations exist in the United States. We see extreme changes in the face of Christianity since Christ first established the church during His personal ministry.

However, we must also realize that sects in religion are nothing new. During the life of Christ two main groups (we could use the term denominations) divided Judaism. The Pharisees and the Saducees both held to the Jewish faith and law, but they differed on several doctrinal issues. Factions developed very early in the life of the church. Paul spoke against those who tried to mix the Jewish law with the grace of God. He labeled these people Judaizers. The Gnostics also infiltrated Christianity in the churches of Colosse and Ephesus. Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus for this very reason. Passages from Paul's epistles to Timothy serve as a basis for this lesson.

The Reason for the Differences

It is obvious that differences in doctrine, practices, and administration occur between the denominations. That is why we are distinct. Baptist churches differ greatly from Roman Catholic, Nazarene, or Pentecostal churches. We do not agree on a number of issues, and the differences are so great that we cannot fellowship with them on a church-to-church level.

We must also understand that within the major groups (Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, etc.) further divisions outline specific tenets or policies. Sadly, many Americans feel that if Baptist is in the church name, the churches are the same. A comparison of the doctrinal

statements of churches affiliated with the Baptist Missionary Association of America (BMAA), the General Baptists, and the Primitive Baptists shows vast differences in policy and doctrine.

However, this question still remains: Why do these divisions exist? The first portion of the lesson text, I Timothy 6:3-5, tells of three factors that cause divisions.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... Romans 16:1, 7-19
Tuesday ..... I Corinthians 3:9-11
Wednesday ..... II Corinthians 11:1-15
Thursday ..... Galatians 1:6-12
Friday ..... Ephesians 4:11-16
Saturday ..... II Timothy 2:14-19, 23

The human factor — Essentially, this is the true reason behind the myriad of denominational titles in the world. Humans comprise the memberships of the churches in the world. We are flawed and depraved; therefore, until we become perfect, we will continue to do our own thing. Many denominations sprang from a whim of one particular preacher. That person insisted on maintaining a certain belief and withdrew from or was excluded from another group. That attitude is precisely why Paul warned Timothy, *"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ,...from such withdraw thyself"* (I Timothy 6:3, 5). Denominations founded by one individual or based on one doctrine contradict the Word of God.

The head factor — I am confident that the church I belong to affiliates with a group that most closely teaches the literal Word of God. If I didn't feel this way, I would join another church. Almost everyone feels that his or her church is "right." However, different interpretations of Scripture will happen. These interpretations stem from the mind. Many of these groups have a good heart. We might say that many denominations are sound in many areas, but one or two particular issues divide us. Our differences occur because we cannot have a meeting of the minds, or we agree to disagree in certain areas. Both parties are *"proud"* (verse 4) of their position and will not change their minds. Therefore, the two factions cannot participate as equals.

The heart factor — The final reason for the many denominations is a failure of the heart. So many in our world will not come to accept the logical and plain teachings of Scripture because they are blinded by *"perverse disputings"* (verse 5). Another way of saying that is "misleading arguments." Many in these denominations are following people who, in some cases, intentionally mislead others. Many denominations began as a way to mislead others, but they have respect in some parts of the world. It is obvious to see that these individuals have *"corrupt minds"* and are *"destitute of truth"* (verse 5). We must guard our minds and our hearts so that we do not fall into these traps. No matter how logical some may sound, we must examine every doctrine on the basis of the Scriptures.

The Responsibility of the Disciples

We have a responsibility to maintain sound doctrine. If one examines the doctrinal statement of the BMAA, he or she will find several passages of Scripture supporting our beliefs. Anyone can publish a list of beliefs, but can those beliefs be proved by God's Word? That is the key to any doctrine. As members of our churches, we must be disciples of our Lord and continue in His teachings.

Know God's Word. Paul told Timothy, *"Study to shew thyself approved, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed"* (II Timothy 2:15). God taught me a valuable lesson early in my educational experience. When I was in the fourth grade, I decided that I didn't need to put any effort into studying for school. Up to that point, I had made excellent grades in school; so I thought I deserved a rest. For the next several weeks, I never studied my social studies. I barely even looked at the book. Within the next nine weeks, my grade plummeted. On one test, I made a fifty out of one hundred. My teacher confronted me about the situation. Mrs. Casey said, "Do you realize that you failed this test? Aren't you embarrassed?" Indeed, I was! From that day on, I learned to study so that I would not be ashamed of my work.

The very same is true with God's Word. If we never open THE Book, when God gives a test, we will fail every time. As Christ's disciples, we *must* study God's Word. We need to know about it and what is in it. The only way to learn about who God is and what He teaches is by studying the Word. If you do not spend some time in the Scripture every day, start *today!*

Know your doctrine. I feel that we are not doing a good enough job teaching one another what the Bible teaches. We know about salvation, about hell, and about sin. However, do all of our people know about sanctification? Do they know about atonement? Do they understand inerrancy? My fear is that when we win people to Christ, we do not teach them sufficiently. Most often, we assume that young Christians will absorb our doctrines by osmosis. That is, our doctrines float around in the air vents of our churches; so, if people will attend our services, they will breathe in our teachings. The beliefs, then, are automatically deposited into their brains.

Paul tells Timothy, *"Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned"* (II Timothy 3:14). The only way Timothy learned was by someone teaching him. We know his mother and grandmother taught him the things of God (II Timothy 1:5). Paul also tutored him in the knowledge of the Scriptures. We must know what we believe and teach what we believe, so that those beliefs will continue to be heeded until Christ returns.

Know how to defend your doctrine. Defending the faith is as important as knowing the faith. God gave us His Word so that we would be able to defend ourselves against attack. Satan directly at-

tacks us daily, and it is through God's Word that we defend ourselves from his *"fiery darts"* (Ephesians 6:16). Very often, others attack us also. Some time ago, I received a phone call from a lady I have never met. She began asking questions concerning different ideas in Scripture. At first, I thought she genuinely sought information about the Bible. As the conversation continued, however, it became obvious that she belonged to a different denomination and wanted to debate the Scriptures. (A word to the wise: you cannot debate ignorance and stubbornness.) Maybe you often face similar circumstances. It is imperative for us to be able to defend what we believe.

Can you defend your faith? Take this test without using a concordance, dictionary, commentary, encyclopedia, doctrinal statement, Scripture list, or any other help. Ready? (1) List two scriptures that teach salvation by grace alone. (2) Using passages from the Bible, give three reasons for the doctrine of the security of the believer. (3) Cite three verses from the New Testament that deal with the deity of Christ. (4) List four functions of the Holy Spirit, giving biblical support for each. (5) Give three reasons, according to the Bible, for believing in the depravity of man. (6) List four ministries of the church, with supporting passages from God's Word.

To test the accuracy of your answers, locate a copy of the Doctrinal Statement of the Baptist Missionary Association of America. Be honest, and score yourself as follows:

- 6 correct — Excellent! You are a soldier of the Lord.
- 4 or 5 correct — Great! Keep on studying.
- 3 correct — Good. You know the basics; now go deeper.
- 2 correct — Average. Start today to be a better disciple.
- 0 or 1 correct — Poor. Apply II Timothy 2:15.

5 Is There Really Going to Be a Hell?

Luke 16:19-31

Many in the world today ask, "What will happen to us when we die?" The only humans who can answer that question with complete certainty are those in the grave. By faith in God's Word, we know that everyone will enter an eternal state following death. Some have assurance that they will be with Jesus; others are optimistic about going. But what if one doesn't go to heaven? What happens then?

Accept Christ and escape the reality of hell.

Our society rejects the idea that good, moral people will go to hell. They feel that hell is the place for Adolf Hitler, Charles Manson, Jeffery Dahmer, and others who are really evil. Research indicates that many people are now rejecting the idea of hell. Two thirds of America's teenagers do not believe in hell. Today's teens are tomorrow's parents who will pass that belief on. God's Word is clear about life after death. It declares that hell is real, and only one way exists to escape it.

The Proof of Hell

If one rejects God's Word, it is impossible to convince him or her that hell truly exists. As mentioned, the ones who know without a doubt cannot communicate with us. In fact, that is exactly what the person in the lesson text wanted to be able to do. Jesus tells a parable about two men: *"a certain rich man" and "Lazarus"* (verses 19, 20). Two people give firsthand accounts that hell is a very real place.

The testimony of Jesus — You are probably aware that Christ spoke twice as many times about hell as He did about heaven. The primary source of our information about the eternal state of the wicked comes to us from Jesus himself. Our lesson text directly declares that hell exists. Jesus says, *"In hell* [the rich man] *lift up his eyes, being in torments"* (verse 23). Doubters have a very small foundation to stand on when they try to contradict Jesus. It is very clear that Christ teaches here that a place exists where the soul is punished in a lake of fire. Many other times Christ speaks of this place *"where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched"* (Mark 9:48).

The testimony of John — God never contradicts himself. He always corroborates His testimony with other eyewitnesses (even though He doesn't need them). God gave John the apostle a chance to see into the future. He gives a magnificent description of the horror of the tribulation period as well as the glories of the New Jerusalem. Notice what John describes in Revelation 20:10, 14, 15. He says that at the end of the judgment a multitude will be *"cast into the lake of fire."* That is the same description that Jesus gives in our lesson text and in the other places where He mentions it. Hell is a very real place.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... Matthew 7:13, 14
Tuesday ..... Matthew 13:24-30
Wednesday ..... Matthew 22:8-14
Thursday ..... Mark 9:42-48
Friday ..... II Thessalonians 1:3-10
Saturday ..... Revelation 14:9-11

The Picture of Hell

What will hell be like? All the accounts of hell present it as a place of indescribable terror. Nothing there is pleasant or enjoyable. In spite of the fact that we often hear others speak of hell in a flippant or off-color manner, it will be a terrible experience for those who go there. Notice three ideas about this eternal state.

It is a place of separation. Separation from every source of happiness and relief is the great sorrow for those in hell. They are also separated from loved ones in heaven. Most importantly, those in hell are separated from God. God tells the rich man that no one in heaven can cross over into that realm because *"there is a great gulf fixed"* (verse 26) between the two places. I believe that even though millions of people will reside in that awful place, each person will have an overwhelming sense of isolation and loneliness.

It is a place of wickedness. Hell is the place *"prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Matthew 25:41). No human being is as evil as Satan is; yet John describes those who will reside as being *"fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters"* (Revelation 21:8). No holy, good, righteous, or profitable thing will be there.

It is a place of agony. The most awful picture we have of hell is that it is a place of excruciating agony. In lesson 2 we noted the conditions in hell, but it is important to remind ourselves often of the horror of it. Christ called hell a *"furnace of fire"* (Matthew 13:42, 50). He tells us that the people in hell cry for mercy and relief, but they find none. Hell is a place of *"everlasting punishment"* (Matthew 25:46), which is the reason for the existence of hell.

The Purpose of Hell

Why is there a need for a place of eternal punishment? Two factors are involved in the purpose of hell.

To punish rebellion against God — The original purpose of hell was to be the place for Satan and the angels that led a rebellion against God. Remember Matthew 25:41? Christ said God created hell *"for the devil and his angels."* Satan's punishment for rebelling against God is eternal existence in hell. Certainly he deserves everything he will get. However, think about this: Every one of us has rebelled against God. Rebellion is failing to honor authority. In our sinful nature, we rebel against God daily. We refuse to let Him be Lord of our lives; so God is just in sentencing humans to a place of punishment.

To punish rejection of God — The sad part is that most of those who will go to hell think they are all right. Very few in the world would lead a planned rebellion against God. Most citizens are moral and good-natured, but the only thing that sentences a person to hell is a rejection of God. Even though we are in a state of rebellion, God offers forgiveness and grace through the death of Jesus. We have the opportunity to escape the reality of hell by finding Jesus Christ. We are to confess our sin of unbelief and ask Jesus to be the Savior and Lord of our lives (Romans 10:9, 10, 13). Read Revelation 21:8 again. The second class of people that John mentions are the *"unbelieving."* Those who reject God's offer of grace will experience eternity in the horrible place known as hell.

I pray that you are born again. I certainly do not want you to experience eternity separated from God. You have the information necessary to make a decision, and the decision is yours alone. If you are born again, how many in your neighborhood or workplace know Jesus? It is your responsibility to warn them of their doom. We cannot force them to accept Christ, but we can deliver the Good News.

6 Does a Loving God Really Send People to Hell?

Romans 1:18-22; II Timothy 1:8, 9

Each person chooses to accept or reject God's free gift of salvation.

Is it fair for God to sentence good people to eternal death? Isn't God being unmerciful when He doesn't allow everyone to go to heaven? I thought that the Bible said, "God is love." If that is true, why would God go against His Word? All of those questions appear to be credible arguments against eternal judgment for all. No one believes himself to be a bad person; therefore, many ask, "Why would God send me to hell?" Nevertheless, we must assure ourselves that hell is real, and many there are not necessarily evil. Those who go to hell will all meet one criterion only: all who do not enter heaven will have rejected God's way of salvation. With that in mind, we can, through the Scriptures, come to three conclusions concerning man's relationship to hell.

God Has No Choice

The first thing we must understand is that when someone enters hell, God does not make a decision based on opinion or emotion. When a person stands before Christ to receive judgment, his or her fate is already determined. God does not weigh one's life in the balance to determine righteousness. Righteousness is the key to determining one's eternal destiny. Paul explained that *"The wrath of God is revealed ... against all ungodliness and unrighteousness"* (Romans 1:18). We realize that God is holy. That means there is no imperfection, sin, or stain about Him. His holiness directly relates to His righteousness. God cannot dwell with unrighteousness or ungodliness; if He did, He would become unholy. Therefore, God has no choice. He *must* separate all unrighteousness from His presence.

Notice also that verse 18 tells us that His *"wrath"* is *"revealed."* When many people think about the wrath of God, they imagine an old man with a long beard standing on a cloud, hurling a lightning bolt at someone. Very few times do we find in God's Word where God unleashed vengeance upon people instantaneously. I believe one finds the clearer picture in the text of this lesson. The original language

uses a verb form which means "is being revealed." God's wrath is a natural process, not a formal decree. When sin entered the world, did God sit around and agonize over whether He should do something about it? Did He weigh the benefits and advantages? Did He call a council meeting with the angels? No! God had no decision to make. His reaction was a natural process, and so it will be in eternity. God uses one determining factor: is the person righteous?

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... Deuteronomy 30:15-20
Tuesday ..... Psalm 1:1-6
Wednesday ..... John 3:14-21
Thursday ..... Romans 10:4-13
Friday ..... II Corinthians 4:1-10
Saturday ..... Hebrews 3:6-15

Man Has Every Chance

If righteousness is the key, then how does one gain that righteousness? We mentioned in previous lessons how some believe. Remember the rich young ruler? He wanted to know, *"What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"* (Matthew 19:16). Doing good things does not gain righteousness. One finds it in three steps.

Recognition — To gain righteousness, one must recognize that in his natural state he is unrighteous (Romans 3:10, 23; 5:12). One does not start out holy before God. If he did, what would have been the need for Christ's sacrifice? Everyone must recognize that he is a sinner and that Jesus is his sacrifice (Romans 5:8). His death on Calvary paid for mankind's sins (Hebrews 9:12-14, 26).

Repentance — Simply recognizing those aspects of life will not get a person any closer to heaven or any farther away from hell. He must respond with the knowledge of that information. That response must be in the form of repentance. *"The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (II Peter 3:9). Repentance means turning away from a life in sin to a life in Christ.

When a person realizes that, he has just found the key: God wants everyone to *"come to repentance."* That shows that each individual has the chance to find righteousness if he will make the decision to repent. Here is where one discovers that God makes no decision about where he experiences eternity. God's only role will be to point out the fact that the individual did or did not *"come to repentance."*

Redemption — The final step in gaining righteousness is redemption. By repenting, one shows that he is placing his faith in God's plan. When he repents by confessing his sin to God and asking Him to give him eternal life, God redeems the sinner. Redemption is a transfer of funds. When one goes to the bank to borrow money for a home or automobile, the lending institution transfers to the borrower's account the money needed to make the purchase. In es-

sence, the bank buys it for him until he can repay the debt. In redemption, God transfers the funds to pay man's debt of sin. The unit of currency is blood. Christ's blood buys man's righteousness (I Peter 1:18, 19). Notice this twist. God cancels the debt! The believer owes Him nothing. One's faith and repentance transfer Christ's blood to his account (Romans 4:5) free of charge.

Christians Have the Challenge

The only obligation we have concerning our debt is to tell others about God's free offer. Recently, I watched one of the many infomercials that flood our televisions these days. The spokesman told the audience, "We want some word of mouth advertising; so if you promise to tell just one person about our new product we will send you this gift." As I thought about that, I realized that it is similar to what God says to us. God gives us the gift of salvation. All He asks from us is that we tell others about His saving grace. Our challenge as believers is to spread the news that escaping hell is based on faith and repentance, not chance and wishes.

Paul told Timothy in his final letter, *"Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord"* (II Timothy 1:8). Are we embarrassed about our salvation? We often concern ourselves with our own feelings and comfort. We let Satan discourage us and plant thoughts of insecurity and doubt in our minds. We must realize that God has *"called us with a holy calling"* (II Timothy 1:9) to be His servants and messengers. When we fail to accept that calling, dozens of our family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors enter eternity forever doomed to a lake of fire. How many of us have ever thought about how many people we sentenced to hell because we were afraid of getting laughed at? The challenge is real; we must accept it.

The picture is very clear in Revelation 20:11-15. On the day of the great white throne judgment, God will open the Book of Life to manifest to those standing before Him why they will not enter heaven. The reason is that none of their names will be written in that book. God will perform this duty to show His justice, to prove that the sentence to the lake of fire is not based on circumstantial evidence or a slight tip of the scales. The evidence will be simple, yet overwhelming. Those who go to hell will be there because they failed to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. How many will be our loved ones?

7 Why Would God Love Someone Like Me?

John 4:13-29; Matthew 18:11-14

God loves everyone equally.

Occasionally, all of us tend to question ourselves in the sight of God. We sometimes take a personal inventory and realize that God is probably not pleased with our lifestyle. Our problem is that we confuse pleasure or happiness with love. We base our love upon certain conditions. We love in such a way that says, "I love you because you...." We might say we love reciprocally. We love those who love us back. Christ condemned that kind of love (Matthew 5:46). He demonstrated and taught that love is to be unconditional. We are to love everyone with whom we come in contact.

We also need to recognize that our love fluctuates. Even those we dearly love, such as our spouses, children, or parents, get on our nerves at times, and our love for them wanes. That is not true with God. His love is constant. God assures us that His love toward us is not based on our merit. His love is a part of His sovereign character. The lesson we should achieve is twofold: we should never doubt God's love for us; we should love others as He loves us. Christ shows us these truths in our study this week.

Love Exemplified

In John 4 we have one of the most interesting sections of the Gospels. We find Jesus passing through a Samaritan village. The passage tells us that while there He stopped by a well and met a lady who happened to be drawing water. We find Jesus showing His love and being our example of love. What we must realize is that His love always pours over into the realm of evangelism because God demonstrates His love through salvation and His sacrifice (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).

His attitude: desirous of salvation for all — Christ ministered without regard to people's background or circumstances. God's love is the same for every person. He is not concerned about the physical aspects of individuals. Notice that Christ was unconcerned that the Samaritan woman was of mixed heritage. The Samaritans were half Jewish and half Assyrian. That was a major stumbling block to the

Jewish leaders; yet Christ, in unconditional love, reached out to that woman with the message of eternal life. He was unconcerned that she was of low social status. It was obvious that she was of the lower class because she was drawing water. Only servants or those who could not afford servants went to the well.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... Joshua 1:1-21
Tuesday ..... Ruth 1:7-17
Wednesday ..... Psalm 91:14-16
Thursday ..... Luke 19:2-10
Friday ..... John 6:35-40
Saturday ..... John 10:14-18

Jesus did not care that she had a bad attitude. When He posed to her the possibility of His giving her water, she replied sarcastically (John 4:11, 12). Often, when we encounter those who are in bad moods or are mean-spirited, we reject them saying, "I'm not going to waste my time." Christ never thought it a waste to offer eternal life. The Son of God did not consider that she had a bad reputation. It is obvious that the woman at the well was an outcast. She was alone there. The others drew water at a different time or a different place. As the Word indicates, she was a lady known for her promiscuity; yet Christ showed love to her. How many missionaries, pastors' wives, deacons, or Sunday School teachers have our churches missed because a person's reputation prevented us from loving them? Christ's example should be our lifestyle. Our love should cross over all social barriers, because everyone needs love and salvation.

His approach: direct yet unconventional — Jesus made the first contact with the Samaritan woman. He asked her for a drink of water. Why was she so surprised? First, she recognized that Jesus was a Jew. During this time, a deep rift separated the two groups. The Bible mentions that Jesus purposely went through Samaria, although most Jews traveling that direction took a much longer route around the region. She never expected kind words from a Jew. Christ calls us to tear down the walls of prejudice. Our love must extend to all.

She may have been surprised because, according to the law, a rabbi could not speak to a woman in public. Remember that this was very early in Christ's ministry, and at this point He was fulfilling that role of teacher and guide to His band of disciples. Christ broke the law and the tradition by approaching this lady. However, we must notice that Jesus rarely followed traditional ways.

His advice: receive God's gift — Christ's love did not stop at simply speaking to the lady or showing kindness. He showed the ultimate love for an individual. He shared with her how she could gain eternal life. He expressed the importance and simplicity of finding peace with God. It is obvious that our love does not reach very far. We seldom think it important for us to share the gospel with anyone. We expect our pastor or evangelists to do enough for all of us. The example of Christ is that we are responsible for declaring God's grace to all. That

doesn't mean that we must always be quoting Scripture and badgering individuals about salvation. It does mean that we are to use the opportunities given us to show Christ's love in our lives.

Love Explained

Being the Master Teacher, Jesus took every opportunity to instill within His disciples the principles of being followers of Christ. His personal examples, as the incident with the woman at the well shows, deepened the truths that He presented during times of verbal teaching or conversation. In Matthew 18:11-14, we find Christ teaching His disciples about God's love for us. He illustrates it with a story of a shepherd and a lost sheep.

Love shows concern. Christ prefaced His remarks by assuring the disciples of His purpose. This marks the first proof of God's love for mankind. Christ came *"to save that which was lost"* (verse 11). If God did not love us, why would He have left the glory of heaven to endure the pain of earth? Paul tells us that Christ *"made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Philippians 2:7, 8). Christ willingly became a man to give us eternal life. John 3:16 should clear all doubt: *"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son."* God loves us, and His concern is obvious.

Love shows commitment. The shepherd illustrates the next proof of God's love. Jesus poses a question to those around Him: *"If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?"* (verse 12) This illustration teaches us some important truths. (1) Every individual is special. In the story of the one hundred sheep, the only thing special about the one was that it was lost. He didn't call attention to its special abilities or its beautiful characteristics. We get the idea that it was an ordinary sheep, but it was significant. The same is true in our lives. Each person is significant in God's eyes. He loves us because we are His children. A single man was standing next to a father of four, watching the children at a park. The single one asked the father, "Why do you love your children?" The father stood there somewhat perplexed for a few moments trying to give an answer. "I love them because they are mine," the father responded. In like manner, God loves us, not because of the things we do or are, but simply because we belong to Him.

We also discover in this parable that (2) God will seek us when we stray. He is so committed to us that He will not let us wander off without seeking to bring us back. When one of His sheep wanders,

He makes a committed effort to bring it back. In the parable, we find the shepherd risking His own welfare by going *"into the mountains"* (verse 12) to rescue the sheep. Even though it was not the shepherd's fault that the sheep disobeyed His urges to stay with the flock, even though he might be exhausted from the day's work, He still makes the effort to bring the sheep in.

The same is true in our lives. First, God gave His life so that we might become His sheep; and now, He is still committed to us. God is not going to let us stray far from Him without attempting to bring us back. For the believer, that sometimes involves difficulty or crisis. Do not think when trouble comes in your life that God is abandoning you. It may be that God is desperately seeking to bring His wandering sheep back into the fold. He loves us, and never wants us to be separated.

"Dear God, thank You for Your unending, unconditional love for us. Thank You for loving us so much that You gave Your life. Please help us to show the same love to others that You have so wondrously shown to us. Amen."

8 Does Science Contradict the Bible?

Genesis 1:1-31; Psalm 147:3-12

"So you see, class, the Bible and science are like oil and water. They simple do not mix. We have so much more knowledge today than those who compiled the stories in the Bible. We will see you next time." Across the United States in almost every major university, students will hear words similar to those. Those statements are entering many of the high schools and junior high schools. For the most part, those statements are going unchallenged. Many of the students reason, "These men and women have studied for a long time; so they must know what they are talking about." In most instances, however, the instructors are simply repeating what they read in a book or what their teachers told them.

God created everything according to His own design and order.

Science and the Bible do mix. If one studies the Word of God closely enough, he or she will discover that the Bible contains scientific truths, but it does not express them in scientific terms. We must also understand that knowledge has not increased. Rather, technology has increased. The advances in research equipment, testing procedures, and communications allow more people to know more things than ever before. In our study this week, we will reaffirm our trust in God's Word by discovering the wonderful connection between the Scriptures and science.

Scripture Supersedes Science

The problem with those who miss the correlation between the Bible and science is that they are putting their trust in the wrong area. The Bible holds a greater position than science ever could. The professors and instructors regard the Bible as myth, because they blindly follow those who taught them. We need to teach ourselves and our children that the Bible is trustworthy in all its aspects. It is the greatest piece of literature ever produced. It is the only sure foundation for life. The Scriptures supersede science because of two main factors. Science approaches the things of earth blindly. They try to

build the universe upon an accident. God's Word clearly defines the workings of our world. It presents to any who read it a magnificent designer and a magnificent design.

The designer — Our universe did not happen by accident or chance. A being we know as Jehovah created the universe according to His will. The profitable thing to us is that we are not left to wonder about the mind or attributes of the Creator. The first chapter of the Bible describes a designer with three characteristics.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... I Samuel 2:2-10
Tuesday ..... II Samuel 2:7-16
Wednesday ..... Job 26:1-14
Thursday ..... Psalm 104:1-24
Friday ..... Ecclesiastes 1:5-10
Saturday ..... Jeremiah 31:35-39

(1) He is omnipotent. *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1). Our God is the most powerful being ever known because He formed the universe by speaking it into existence. He did not have to hire several contractors to dig the oceans or build the mountains; neither did He have to go back and redesign any of His creation. When God created the world with His voice, He created it in its perfect condition.

(2) He is omniscient. God knows how everything will work and how it should fit into place. His wisdom extends far beyond the greatest contemplation of man. Scientists feel that their discoveries took great minds, and they teach that we can know all the answers of the universe through continued education and research. All that man learns comes from the wisdom God places in us. We know nothing apart from God. God is the one *"in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"* (Colossians 2:3).

(3) He is over all. The world's designer is the designer because He is sovereign. No other being rivals His place of authority. The word translated *"God"* in Genesis 1 signifies one who is supreme. He has the authority and ability to create and to destroy. We must also understand that our God is not one of many gods, but He is the *only* God. His words are clear and sure. We owe Him reverence and obedience.

The design — It is very clear that creation is not an accident. It has a distinct design. God's Word explains to us the nature of that design.

(1) Planned order — The account of creation declares that God created in an orderly fashion. He began with light or a nonunified form. In sequential order He gathered the necessary elements to form the atmosphere, water, land, and plant life. From there, He moved to create the heavenly bodies to set in motion the workings of our universe. On the last two days of creation, He made the animal kingdom, including man. It is interesting to note that all the theories of the origins of life follow this same order. They have their own explanations;

yet the order is significant. Is that an accident?

(2) Perfect connection — The design of the universe is that everything works together in harmony. Scientists tell us how fortunate we are that we sprang up on this planet. Earth is the only planet with the right mix of gases to sustain life. The distance from the sun is so precise that if it moved closer or farther away by a few hundred miles some of the planet would be incapable of supporting life. The rotation of the planet is such that even a slight variation would cause violent earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, tornadoes, or fluctuations of temperature of over one hundred degrees from noon to night. Is that an accident?

(3) Personal involvement — The most significant part of the design is that God's hand is the source of all. At the end of each stage of creation we find, *"and God saw that it was good"* (Genesis 1:12, 18, 21, 25). The Bible also declares, *"God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness"* (Genesis 1:26). God did not merely wish the world into existence; He had a plan and an order. God took a part of himself and placed it within the heart of creation.

Scripture Precedes Science

Another way to show that the Bible and science mix is to notice the areas of scientific knowledge found in God's Word thousands of years before man recorded the information. These things show us that God enlightens His creation, if they will simply trust in Him rather than themselves. The Bible is more than myth or spiritual teaching; it contains answers to every aspect of life.

Heliocentric universe — Many leaders condemned and ridiculed Copernicus and Galileo for expounding the theory that the earth revolved around the sun rather than the sun revolving around the earth. It wasn't until 1700 that many accepted a fact that God tells us in the oldest book of the Bible. *"Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the dayspring to know his place?"* (Job 38:12). *"Dayspring"* refers to the dawn or the sun. God is pointing out that the sun has the prominent position.

Roundness of the earth — For thousands of years many of the world's scientists reported that the earth's surface was flat. Man would look across the horizon and picture a cliff plunging into darkness. Explorers Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan proved in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that the earth was round. However, the prophet Isaiah tells us, *"It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth"* (Isaiah 40:22).

Gravity — Sir Isaac Newton is credited with discovering gravity in 1666. However, if he had read God's Word and accepted it, he would have praised God like Job, who said, *"He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing"* (Job 26:7).

Lifeline in the blood — Many early doctors killed patients because they didn't understand that the life of a person is in his blood. We know today that if a person loses too much blood he will die, yet God in His law to the children of Israel stated that fact. *"The life of all flesh is the blood thereof"* (Leviticus 17:14).

Classification of animals — In the eighteenth century, the Swedish physician and botanist Carolus Linnaeus developed a system to classify the animals into families and species. However, God developed that idea from the beginning of creation. *"Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth"* (Genesis 1:20). God waited until the next day of creation to create the other animal life, which adds evidence to order and distinction. *"Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind"* (Genesis 1:24).

Those who say the Bible and science have no place together simply do not want to accept God's Word as true. A rejection of the Bible is a rejection of God himself. Scripture does not detail all aspects of science; that is not its purpose. Nevertheless, we should praise God for His faithfulness in every aspect of human life. God's Word is without error.

9 Can a Christian Have Doubts?

Matthew 11:2-11; Romans 7:15-25

Faith in God overcomes doubt.

Christianity and God's Word are under more attack than ever before. In reading different articles, I discover more and more people claiming to be theologians who deny many of the cardinal doctrines of the Bible. Most often, these individuals attack the authenticity of the miracles of Jesus. They attempt to show that the Bible is full of errors. Some claim that Christ's death was merely that of a man who remained committed to His beliefs.

I trust that you reject these people, and your faith stands firm in spite of their lack of spiritual understanding. However, many respond positively to their remarks. Our young people experience similar ideas each day as they attend college or high school. Some will reason, "These are educated men and women. Do they know what they are talking about?" The first seed of doubt can grow into a weed that blocks out all other ideas and teachings. As God's people, we must understand that doubts will exist in our lives occasionally. Nevertheless, we must also understand that God has an answer to every question we face.

Doubt Is Natural

Doubt will often invade our minds. Sometimes it is as simple and as fleeting as "I wonder if my life is nothing more than a dream." At other times, we might have serious doubts about God's existence or the truthfulness of God's Word. Do not let doubt destroy your life. Doubts are not a sign of a life void of salvation. Doubts occur naturally because of two reasons.

We doubt because of our weakness. One reason we doubt is that we are not perfect human beings. Even though God forgives us of our sins, He does not create in us perfection. Paul talked about his struggle with his spiritual side and his natural side in one portion of this week's lesson text. In his letter to the Christians in Rome, he discussed how frustrated he got when he did things that he knew were wrong. *"That which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I*

not; but what I hate, that I do.... For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Romans 7:15, 19, 20).

That is a confusing passage of Scripture, but in common language Paul said, "Very often I do things I do not want to do, and it is because I still have a sin nature." Our doubts often stem from simple human sinfulness. These are things that we cannot control completely. We can have victory over them, and we cannot let these things drive us from God. When doubts arise, confront them as a natural part of life, and claim God's power to overcome them.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... Exodus 4:1, 10-16
Tuesday ..... Judges 6:11-17
Wednesday ..... Job 9:16-23
Thursday ..... Psalm 73:13-16
Friday ..... Psalm 77:1-14
Saturday ..... Matthew 14:28-31

We doubt because of Satan's attack. At other times, our doubts enter our minds because Satan plants them there. He knows he cannot steal our salvation, but he can steal our joy and peace. Revelation 12:10 refers to Satan as *"the accuser of our brethren."* In that role, Satan's angels place questions in our minds to cause us to reconsider our faith. Since we base our relationship with God on faith completely, we have no scientific evidence for our lifestyle. Satan will attack our education. He will cause us to consider other possibilities. He will attempt to get us to compromise our position. When he sends those darts, we must affirm our trust in the Bible. God provides us with His armor in order to help us defeat those doubts (Ephesians 6:10-18). He tells us to use *"the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked"* (Ephesians 6:16). Satan's main goal is to destroy our testimony or our confidence in God. If he can get us to consider our doubts, we cannot be effective servants for Christ.

Doubt Must Be Answered

One thing is certain. When doubts arise, we must not let them go without answering them. If we let those doubts continue to resurface from time to time, they can convert into serious skepticism. When doubts arise, we must do like John the Baptist did. Matthew 11 tells of John's questioning Jesus about His authenticity. John was in prison for standing upon God's Word, and he had to be certain that his beliefs were correct. John sent messengers to Jesus to inquire of Him, *"Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?"* (Matthew 11:3). In seeking for answers to his questions, he gives us the formula for answering our doubts.

Return to the source. Notice that John didn't ask any of the

prophets or any of the other prisoners for their opinion on the matter; he sent after the one in whom he trusted. To answer their questions, Jesus pointed them to the fulfillment of the Scriptures for their answers (verses 4-6). When questions enter our lives, we must go to God's Word for our answers. When Paul and Silas traveled through Asia Minor on Paul's second missionary journey, they encountered a group of people in Berea. They made an interesting observation about their faith. *"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so"* (Acts 17:11). Likewise, we must seek the counsel of God in His Word to relieve our doubt.

Receive God's Word. One thing we must notice in John's question is that his foundation remained firm. He did not doubt his role or the promise of the Bible. He knew that God would send a Messiah; I believe John simply reaffirmed his belief in God's Word. That should be our response as well. God is always going to point us back to our foundation; we must accept the Bible as infallible. Too often we expect mammoth revelations, when all we really need is to receive what God so plainly states.

Recommit your heart. One of the positive aspects of doubt is that it can increase our confidence and faith. There have been times when I doubted certain ideas, or questioned God. Sometimes I realized that I misunderstood some idea, and God showed me the right perspective. Since that time, no one can move me off my affirmation in what I believe. In other instances, I simply recommitted my heart to what I already believed. Again, I strengthened my confidence in God's authority.

Whenever doubts infest your life because of weakness or attack, be the victor over those things. Make a point of solidifying your faith in a God who wants you to give your life totally to Him. If your faith is not strong, then you will not be a consistent soldier of the cross. However, in those times you will discover God's truth and trustworthiness that you are able to be a warrior in His kingdom.

10

Won't Heaven Be Boring?

Revelation 21:10-27; 22:1-6

Heaven is a place of ecstatic activity.

One evening an evangelist in a church preached with all his power on the hereafter. Near the middle of the sermon, he addressed the congregation. "How many here want to go to heaven?" Half of the congregation lifted their hands. The preacher continued on with vigor. At another point, he stopped and asked those present, "How many want to go to heaven?" This time about three fourths of the group raised their hands. The minister continued on with even more fervor. As he reached the climax of his message, he shouted, "Who wants to go to heaven?" All the congregation leaped from their seats and shouted. All, that is, but one little boy on the front pew. The preacher asked him, "Son, don't you want to go to heaven?" "Oh yes, I want to go to heaven," the little boy replied, "but I thought you were getting a bus load ready to go tonight."

At times, some might have a similar attitude. When told that they will spend eternity in heaven, they ask, "What will we do all day?" That is a good question. What will occupy our time in our eternal home? The final book of the Bible gives us a sneak preview of what heaven will be like. God's Word assures us that it will not be boring.

Heaven Will Be a Place of Unimaginable Beauty

The first thing we will notice about our eternal home is its enormous size. The largest home I ever remember seeing was a documentary on the palace at Versailles, France. The complex sat on seventeen thousand acres, and the building could house hundreds of people. Compare that to a structure that measures 1,500 miles wide, 1,500 miles long, and 1,500 miles high (Revelation 21:16). If we placed the building on top of the United States, it would stretch from Denver, Colorado, to Roanoke, Virginia, and would extend into Canada and the Gulf of Mexico. But that is only the base area. New Jerusalem is 1,500 miles high. That extends far past our visible atmosphere. The size of the city indicates an estimated possible popu-

lation of over 230 billion. Those figures stem from considering one level at each mile! If it is built like skyscrapers of today, we need to multiply that number by five hundred.

The next thing that we will notice about the city is its overwhelming beauty. The Word of God indicates that the walls of the city consist of jasper. Some scholars indicate that jasper is another name for a diamond. The walls of the city measure 216 feet (Revelation 21:17). I believe this indicates the thickness of the wall, because the height of the city is already mentioned. The city incorporates three gates on each side. Those gates are each one pearl. The gates are not made of pearls, but each is one pearl (Revelation 21:21). The city also rests upon twelve foundations. Each foundation is inlaid with precious gems. Imagine walking up to a city where the foundation is layers of dazzling colors of blue, green, red, purple, and yellow.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... Acts 7:54-56
Tuesday ..... Hebrews 11:8-16
Wednesday ..... II Peter 3:10-13
Thursday ..... Revelation 2:1-7
Friday ..... Revelation 5:8-10
Saturday ..... Revelation 7:9-12

The Bible also declares that a river, originating from God's throne, flows through the middle of the city (Revelation 22:1). On either side of the river the tree of life stands for us to enjoy its twelve different kinds of fruits. The sun will never set on the city because *"the city* [has] *no need of the sun ... for ... the Lamb is the light thereof"* (Revelation 21:23). However, the beauty of the city will be the most insignificant part of heaven. Our lives there will focus on only one thing.

Heaven Will Be a Place of Unparalleled Excitement

The main focus of our lives in heaven will be our Savior. We attend church because we recognize it as "God's house." Even though God is omnipresent, we still recognize our church as being holy. However, in heaven we will be with Jesus face to face, so every day will be Sunday! Notice also that no disappointments or evil will corrupt our eternal home. *"There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie"* (Revelation 21:27).

We can be confident that we will not get bored because we will be very busy. Some ask, "What will we do in heaven for all those years?" I believe we will do in heaven what we should be doing here on earth. Notice the three activities in heaven. (1) We will worship. The first glimpse of heaven in Revelation pictures to us a glorious worship service for our Lord and Savior. In Revelation chapters 4 and 5, John tells us that those in heaven praise God and sing songs unto Him. Is that not one of our responsibilities on earth? The New Testament

warns us, "[Do not forsake] *the assembling of your selves together as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as you see the day approaching*" (Hebrews 10:25). We might look at this life as a dress rehearsal for heaven. I wonder if some Christians will be uncomfortable. On earth, some worship Christ only when it is convenient for them. In heaven, that will be the highlight of our activity.

(2) We will serve. Read Revelation 22:3. Notice the last phrase, "*His servants shall serve him.*" We are Christ's servants. Peter and Paul in their epistles often referred to themselves as servants of God. Paul especially recognized believers as Christ's bond slaves (I Corinthians 7:22). While on earth, we sometimes have a hard time getting motivated to serve Christ as we ought. We are always too busy with activities at work or school. In heaven, we will serve without hesitation. In fact, we will be begging to be able to do something for our Lord. Nevertheless, we cannot neglect our responsibility on earth. We cannot have the attitude "I'll wait until I get to heaven." Christ needs us to serve now. We must understand that we owe Christ our lives. Shouldn't we at least give something back in return? Be about your Father's business.

(3) We will commune with God. "*They shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads*" (Revelation 22:4). Carrie Breck wrote a wonderful poem that Grant Tullar set to music, and it appears in most of our hymnals. "Face to face I shall behold Him, far beyond the starry sky./ Face to face in all His glory, I shall see Him by and by." What joy and excitement it will be to be able to sit at the feet of Jesus and simply see Him and talk with Him! Even if we dwell in the middle of a rocky wilderness, if Jesus is there, it will be heaven.

Do you want to go to heaven? The only way for you to experience the wonder of eternity with Jesus is by placing your faith in His death and resurrection. Reread verse 27 of the lesson text. Did you notice what it said? The only ones who will enter New Jerusalem will be "*they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.*" Do you know Jesus as your personal Savior? Your teacher or pastor will be glad to explain the way you can receive eternal life. If you are certain of your eternal home, do you have family members, neighbors, or coworkers who are lost? Have you mentioned your Savior to them lately? Believers are not here to be selfish with their Jesus. Share the gospel whenever you have the opportunity.

11 What's Wrong With Sex Outside of Marriage?

Genesis 2:18, 21-25

It seems that our nation is falling into the same trap that many others have — the trap of sexuality. Historians point to the Greek and Roman empires as illustrations of how a decline in morality affected the whole nation. America, I fear, is experiencing that decline. We are not just obsessed with sexual activity; we are obsessed with adultery and premarital sex.

God placed sexual intimacy within the marriage relationship.

We can turn on our television any hour of the day and see the nation's attitude about sex. In the morning, the talk-show circuit airs men and women gloating about how many partners they slept with during the past year. In the afternoon, soap operas depict a lifestyle that is devoid of commitment, a way of life in which people base their relationships solely on physical aspects. A monitoring agency counted over 975 sexual incidents in prime time in one month of programming on the four major networks. Only 9 percent of those incidents involved married couples. The apparent attitude of many of our citizens is, "What difference does it make? It isn't 1950 anymore." God says that it makes a difference. Let's look at why.

It Controls the Individual

God designed sex to be a powerful force within us. We cannot, nor should we, deny that we have a sexual drive and that God put it into us. God ordained sexual activity within a marriage relationship. *"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled"* (Hebrews 13:4). The same drive that honors God when a husband and wife come together dishonors God outside that relationship. It dishonors God because the individual is letting the sex drive control him or her rather than God. The Bible teaches that we are to have self-control and not give our bodies to whatever desire or temptation comes upon us.

Many today are falling victim to six lies that are being accepted as truth.

1. Lust equals love. Most do not know the difference between lust and love. Many think that an arousal of feelings indicates love. The

physical attraction to someone is not love.

2. Appetites should be satisfied. Some look at sex as an appetite of the body like hunger, thirst, and fatigue. They argue that it is unhealthy not to satisfy those appetites. That is the same philosophy that the Epicureans had in the Greek and Roman eras.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... Leviticus 20:17-21
Tuesday ..... Leviticus 21:7, 13-15
Wednesday ..... Malachi 2:13-16
Thursday ..... I Corinthians 7:1-5
Friday ..... Ephesians 3:25-33
Saturday ..... Colossians 3:18-24

3. Self-control is impossible. One of the saddest remarks I ever heard was by a former surgeon general of the United States. According to this person, our sexual activity is an instinct and reaction to certain stimuli, and it is not really a decision we make. In essence, this person believes we are no higher than animals.

4. Being careful is enough. The federal government is sponsoring advertisement campaigns promoting the use of birth control methods. The campaign says, "When you have sex, always protect yourself from disease and unwanted pregnancy." I am afraid that this attitude leads to more sexual activity because it takes away any repercussions of a decision to have sex.

5. Practice makes perfect. Some people practice premarital sex because they say they want to make their wedding night perfect. Some even practice extramarital sex because they say they want to improve their relationship with their spouse!

6. Morals are outdated. That is probably the oldest lie known to man. People today say, "This is the twentieth century; we are not living in the middle ages." I imagine people used to say, "This is the tenth century; we need to understand our times." I believe that Isaiah, Elisha, Joshua, and Noah all heard similar statements. We must affirm that God's Word stands the test of time. What was wrong for Adam's family is wrong for our family. Morals are not outdated; people are unwilling to follow God's plan.

It Contributes to the Destruction of Society

Sex outside of marriage harms our nation as a whole because it is the single most destructive force in our land. It is the predominant reason for the high divorce rate. Many marriages end because one of the partners commits adultery and the couple cannot reconcile. Many other marriages end in divorce due to premarital sex. Often a couple will marry simply because the girl became pregnant. Those marriages very often are not built on love or commitment but on fear or embarrassment. Those foundations alone will not build a stable marriage. Many other couples get married because they had sexual relations

before marriage and feel a sense of responsibility toward their marriage, or they base their marriage on sexual activity. When reality sets in, those relationships disintegrate.

The breakdown of the traditional family is the single most influential factor for a number of social ills. Weak families are the cause for the increased rate in crime. I believe that the destruction of the family is the reason for the decline in standardized test scores. I believe it is even affecting our performance in the workplace.

Sex apart from marriage contributes to our nation becoming a welfare state. It is no secret that many become pregnant intentionally to increase their benefits in Aid for Dependent Children or food stamps. We cannot blame women and/or racial minorities for these problems. All races are affected, and often men are the instigators of this plan.

Sexual activity outside of marriage is also the cause for the high rate of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Such diseases among those between fifteen and twenty-five years of age are at an all-time high. New strains of syphilis, herpes, and gonorrhea are now affecting our country. These new diseases are immune to the antibiotics that once were effective. AIDS is now at epidemic proportions and is a primary cause of death for those under the age of forty. With all of this in mind, we cannot forget the millions of babies who lost their lives to abortion because of premarital or extramarital sex.

It Contradicts God's Plan

We must understand that the main reason sex apart from marriage is wrong is that it goes against what God established in His Word. It doesn't matter that it harms the individual or society. It is tragic that it does, but our priority should be to recognize that God has a plan that He outlined at the dawn of creation. *"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh"* (Genesis 2:24).

God's plan is built on loyalty. God indicated that *"a man* [should] *leave his father and his mother"* (verse 24). We might better understand the word *"leave"* to mean "forsake." When two people marry, they are to gain a new dependence. During our childhood and teenage years, we depend upon our parents for our needs of love, support, and stability. At marriage, we turn away from them and begin a lifelong commitment to our spouses. We are to depend upon our mates for love, support, and stability. Too often we continue to rely upon our parents for some of our necessities; and parents, of course, want to make sure their children have all they need. Nevertheless, we strengthen our loyalty to our spouses when we "forsake" the security of the parents' home and depend solely upon one another.

God's plan is built on fidelity. *"Therefore shall a man ... cleave unto his wife"* (verse 24). We have a beautiful picture in the original

language in this verse. The word *"cleave"* also describes the scales on a fish. We should have a closeness to our mate that is secure and firm. God intended marriage to be a physical, emotional, and spiritual bond that stands through minor disagreements. The most precious relationship we have with other humans is that between us and our mates. We are to fight valiantly to ensure that that bond remains inseparable.

God's plan is built on unity. When a man and woman come together to marry, they become *"one flesh"* (verse 24). We often only see the physical side of this verse. Yes, that phrase speaks about the sexual union of marriage, and that aspect is a major consideration in the relationship. The Word of God speaks more than we realize of the beauty and joy of the physical relationship of man and wife. However, the idea of being *"one flesh"* goes deeper than the physical. A husband and wife are to be in complete unity in every aspect of their relationship.

The man is to be neither a dictator that rules with an iron fist nor a milquetoast that succumbs to every little pressure given by his wife. The foundation of marriage is love and respect. It is a relationship where two diverse individuals come together to share goals and dreams. A *"one flesh"* marriage unites the whole family for the honor and glory of God. When a partner breaks the chain by his or her selfishness, weakness, or rebellion by engaging in sex outside of marriage, he destroys what God intended to exist.

God's people have a responsibility to be examples in the world. Whenever a Christian couple separates because of extramarital affairs, it hinders the work of the Lord. We must remain on guard for the temptations that Satan will throw at us. We must work diligently to secure our marriages by giving Christ first place in our lives. This world and our churches need strong, stable families built upon God-given principles.

12 Why Do the Righteous Suffer?

II Corinthians 4:8-10

Have you ever felt that God had abandoned you? Whenever trials or difficulties cross our paths, the first thing we think about is what bad thing we did to deserve our trouble. When we see an individual or family whose suffering never seems to end, although they do their best to serve God, we always ask God, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" I don't believe like some who say that God never intends for distress to invade our lives. Many have the false notion that God owes us a happy, fun-filled life for our faith. When Christ walked the earth, were His days all merry and carefree? Why should our lives be any different?

> There is no promise of a trouble-free life.

Many of us as Christians say that we are striving to live like Christ, yet we fail to realize that His life included being laughed at and ridiculed by the Pharisees and Jews, being rejected by most of His family and His neighbors, enduring betrayal, an unjust court, and horrendous torture. We must realize that our Lord oversees every situation in our lives, and that our difficulties should strengthen us.

The Aim of Adversity

Our times of difficulty are not a cruel joke that God plays on us. They have a true purpose and reason. The best verse in God's Word that explains the aim of adversity is Job 23:10. It states, *"He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."* God knows our difficulties, and although He may not be the direct agent of our misfortunes, we are confident that He is allowing them. He will not allow anything to come upon us that He will not also give us grace to cope with (II Corinthians 12:9, 10; I Corinthians 10:13). There are two reasons that adversity enters our lives.

Spiritual discipline — When difficulty strikes, we usually take a spiritual inventory to see how we have failed God because we are confident that He is punishing us. God will discipline us whenever we are not following His will. Jesus wrote to the church at Laodicea these

words: *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten"* (Revelation 3:19). God tells us that we should praise Him for our difficulties because it proves to us that we are His children and that He will not allow our rebellion and disobedience to go unnoticed or uncorrected (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... Genesis 39:5-20
Tuesday ..... Numbers 21:4-9
Wednesday..Deuteronomy 8:11-14, 17-20
Thursday ..... Deuteronomy 33:27-29
Friday ..... Lamentations 5:12-22
Saturday ..... I Timothy 6:3-5, 20, 21

We must remember this, however: Our difficulty is not punishment but discipline. What is the difference? A criminal receives punishment; a child or student receives discipline. The difference involves the intent. Punishment seeks to embarrass and humiliate. Discipline intends to strengthen and to teach. When God disciplines us, He does not want us to run from Him. He desires for us to run to Him. My oldest son is like that. Whenever I punish him for disobeying, without fail or prompting, he wants to hug me and be with me. That makes it difficult to punish him at times; yet I realize my responsibility. When God disciplines, we should seek comfort in His arms.

Spiritual testing — Often our difficulty is not a result of sin. At times, God allows Satan to inflict difficulty upon us to test our faith. Remember Job? God gives us a clear picture that sometimes our adversity is not a result of our rebellion, but it is a result of our commitment. Again, as humans, we do not think that is fair. However, was it "fair" for Jesus to leave heaven to walk on earth? Was it "fair" that God's Son endured a crown of thorns on His head? Was it "fair" for God himself to suffer death for our sins?

Our adversity is a testimony of the faith within us. Satan doesn't waste his time on individuals who are no threat to him. Paul warned Timothy, *"Yea and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"* (II Timothy 3:12). So, it appears we have two options: (1) to live according to the world's standards — not being committed to Christ and not standing up for His cause — and have an easy life; or (2) to be the kind of people Christ wants us to be and experience adversity.

Our suffering works a double blessing in our lives. Satan tests us because of our strong commitment, but that testing should help us become more like Christ. Read verse 10 of the lesson text. Our difficulties strengthen our faith and bring us closer to God. Notice what Paul says a few verses later: *"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"* (II Corinthians 4:17). When we sing "Count Your Blessings," we cannot forget to count the adversity, because the benefits will last in eternity.

The Areas of Adversity

How can we recognize adversity when it hits us? It doesn't matter whether it is discipline or testing, suffering affects seven areas of our lives. Notice these major areas and examples.

1. Financial hardship — Loss of job, sharp decline in profits or sales, sudden excess of expenses, investment failure, bankruptcy.

2. Sickness — Minor illness or afflictions (flu, broken bone, minor surgery, etc.), catastrophic health problems (cancer, heart attack, automobile accident).

3. Death of a loved one — Either sudden or after a lengthy illness.

4. Personal ridicule — Coworkers joking about our Bible study at lunch, being left out of conversations or company parties because others know we are Christians, rejection or scoffing during evangelism.

5. Loss of possessions — Robbery, storm damage, fire.

6. Family crises — Rebellious son or daughter, separation or divorce (either our own or that of a family member), pregnancy before marriage. (Note: Though this is a result of sinful behavior, it is still a traumatic time, and the family should experience spiritual growth from the incident.)

7. Sense of confusion, loss, or abandonment — Uneasiness, restlessness, chronic fatigue, loneliness, depression, lack of motivation and/or direction.

We must also realize that difficulties in one area will cross over into another. For example, a major illness (area 2) might cause financial problems (area 3) and depression (area 7).

The Attitudes in Adversity

How should we react when adversity comes? Some collapse under the pressure; others become angry at God and are filled with bitterness. In some cases, individuals act as if nothing is wrong and ignore the situation. None of those reactions are what God expects or needs from us. Let's look at the three aspects of an apt attitude in adversity.

Claim God's sovereignty. The first thing we must do is to assure ourselves that God is on His throne watching over us. Even if He is disciplining us, we can know that He is in charge. When we are certain that we are not rebelling against God, then we must confess that we do not know why He is allowing these difficulties; but we should praise God that He counts us worthy to experience the *"fellowship of his sufferings"* (Philippians 3:10).

Count on God's promises. Reread verses 8 and 9 of our lesson text. What wonderful promises God gives to us! He says to us that

even though we are at times *"troubled"* we will never be *"distressed"* (verse 8). We can count on the promise that when we are *"persecuted"* (verse 9) God will not cast us aside. Read on through verse 15. If that doesn't make your heart leap, then you need to see a cardiologist. Verse 14 lifts my spirits tremendously: *"He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you."* God promises us that, if our sufferings destroy our physical bodies, one day we will have victory over them through the power of the resurrection! We can rejoice just as Job did: *"I know that my redeemer liveth.... whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold"* (Job 19:25, 27).

Cling to God's hand. The most important thing you can do when suffering strikes is to remain faithful to Christ. Increase your faith whenever trials come in your life. Do not let Satan destroy your confidence in your Savior. If those difficulties are a result of sin, be honest with God; confess your waywardness to Him; ask His forgiveness, and ask Him to *"restore ... the joy of* [His] *salvation"* (Psalm 51:12).

Why do the righteous suffer? Christians suffer in two circumstances, but for only one reason. We experience adversity to correct our walk with Christ, or to strengthen our walk with Christ. However, our difficulties have only one purpose: *"that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound* [overflow] *to the glory of God"* (II Corinthians 4:15).

13 I'm Happy; Why Do I Need Jesus?

Luke 12:15-21

This lesson completes our study of unanswered questions. I trust that you considered the ideas and that you depended on God's Word for direction and answers to the questions. It is profitable for us to reexamine our foundation and strengthen it in areas that may have sagged. I challenge you to continue your diligence in studying the Bible. It contains the answers to any question you might have in life. Whether you are nineteen or ninety-one, God's Book is applicable in every situation you face. I pray that this study improved your walk with Christ.

True joy comes from a relationship with Christ.

This week our lesson focuses on the idea of happiness versus Christ. In the United States Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote that one of our "unalienable rights" is "the pursuit of happiness." We consider happiness to be essential in a person's life. Many have the attitude that if a person is happy then we should leave him alone. The problem with that is that life is more than happiness; and there is something greater than happiness — a relationship with Jesus Christ. Our study this week looks at a man known as the rich fool. He thought being happy was the reason for his existence; but let's notice that happiness is not the most important thing.

Happiness Does Not Produce Joy — Jesus Does

Our founding fathers wanted everyone to enjoy the right to pursue happiness. However, we do not need to pursue *happiness*, but *joy*. Joy is an inner confidence in the sovereignty of God. Joy produces peace, and peace can lead to happiness. You see, we start at the wrong end. People want to gain happiness so that they will eventually find joy. Happiness will never lead one to joy. Jesus is the only source of joy known to man. When the angel announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds, he described the news as *"tidings of great joy"* (Luke 2:10). It was news of joy because it was news of Jesus.

Jesus said, *"These things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves"* (John 17:13).

Joy is associated with life in Christ, not life on earth. The parable that Jesus spoke in the lesson text pictures a man who centered his activities on life on earth. He based his happiness upon what he accumulated on earth. Notice his reaction to a bumper crop: *"I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry"* (verse 19). He had no concern for God in his life. He became satisfied with being happy, rather than trying to find joy in Christ. Joy is a quality that never leaves or dissipates because Jesus never leaves or grows weak.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday ..... Genesis 3:1-6
Tuesday ..... Joshua 7:11-26
Wednesday ..... II Samuel 11:1-5
Thursday ..... I Kings 21:1-16
Friday ..... Ecclesiastes 8:15-17
Saturday ..... Luke 14:17-24

Happiness Is Not Eternal — Jesus Is

Happiness is a condition. If the conditions are right, a person is happy. The rich fool was happy for the moment. He planned to take it easy for the next several years. He didn't consider that circumstances change. When circumstances change, our emotions change. We cannot be happy when we are sick or when tragedy strikes our lives, but we can have Jesus. Our happiness is not guaranteed. God promises that this life will bring disappointment; yet we can remain steadfast because we know Christ will not abandon us.

If we are placing our lives or future in material things, we have no hope of ever finding peace. Life is too uncertain for us to put our faith in the unknown. We must build our lives upon the sure foundation of Jesus Christ. The Bible proclaims *"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever"* (Hebrews 13:8). The rich fool never considered that his new barns could be destroyed in a storm. He never looked beyond his life on earth. Jesus Christ is the foundation for eternity. Being happy is a wonderful part of life, but remember that life will continue in eternity. We must consider this question: Are we living for today and this life, or are we planning for eternity? If we care about eternity, then our pursuit will not be for happiness but for Jesus, the eternal one.

Happiness Will Not Save You — Jesus Will

In order for our joy to continue in eternity, we must accept Jesus as our personal Savior. In Jesus' parable we find the rich fool dying the very night his happiness began. *"God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee"* (verse 20). One day each

of us will stand before Christ as our judge. It will be too late to accept Him as Savior. Many people spend their time in the pursuit of happiness and say, "I will have plenty of time for religion when I am older." Others remark, "I am basically a good person; God will understand."

The problem with the first statement is that God does not promise us tomorrow. In the parable, the man did not see the light of the next day. Paul warns us, *"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"* (II Corinthians 6:2). Death may come upon us at any time without warning. We must prepare today for eternity. Our happiness on earth would mean nothing if we had to stand before Christ and hear Him declare, *"I never knew you: depart from me"* (Matthew 7:23). If death doesn't strike us, then the return of Christ will. Paul describes that day as happening *"in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye"* (I Corinthians 15:52). Peter says that day will arrive *"as a thief in the night"* (II Peter 3:10). We cannot wait to receive Christ. It is a decision we must make now.

The fallacy of the second statement is that eternal life has nothing to do with our own merit. Our salvation is a result of God's grace. Grace is the opposite of individual merit. God is just; He must punish those who rebel against Him. No matter how well we live upon the earth, if our names are not recorded in the Lamb's book of life we will not enter heaven (Revelation 20:15; 21:27). Jesus is the source of our salvation. His death on Calvary atoned for our debt of sin. His blood ransomed us from the clutches of sin. We must place our faith in Him and ask Him to give us eternal life.

As believers, we must be willing to share that news with those with whom we come in contact. You may work next to individuals who are just like the rich fool. They are placing their trust in material things, or they are searching for happiness instead of joy in Jesus. Ask God for the courage and the words to speak to them about salvation. Live your life as an example before them. Pray for them that others will also influence them to accept Christ.

We have the answers for the questions in today's world. Make a difference in someone's life. Be a beacon for someone adrift on the sea of life.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

The subject of "Unanswered Questions" will arouse the curiosity of many believers. The books listed below will deal with at least some of the questions that are considered in this series of studies. Check with your Christian bookstore for other good books dealing with various aspects of this theme.

Give Me an Answer
Cliffe Knechtle
(Intervarsity Press) ISBN 0-87784-569-7

I'm Glad You Asked
Kenneth Boa and Larry Moody
(Victor Books) ISBN 0-88207-354-0

The Bible Has the Answer
Henry M. Morris
(Baker Book House) ISBN 0-8010-5905-4

Willmington's Book of Bible Lists
H. L. Willmington
(Tyndale House Publishers) ISBN 0-8423-8803-6

Further information on the availability and prices of these books may be obtained from Christian bookstores such as the following.

Baptist Bible & Book House

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